

Dateline ERS

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Economic Research Service

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ERS is a primary source of economic research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.



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Commodity Markets and Trade

ERS Outlook reports provide timely analysis of major commodity markets and trade.

This Month

- Ag Trade
- Cotton and Wool
- Fruit and Tree Nuts
- Feed
- Oil Crops
- Rice
- Sugar and Sweeteners
- Wheat

All reports, along with a calendar of future releases, are available at:

www.ers.usda.gov/publications/outlook

Amber Waves

Amber Waves magazine presents the full range of ERS research and analysis, covering food, farming, natural resources, and rural America.

www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/

Are Competitors' Free Trade Agreements Putting U.S. Agricultural Exporters at a Disadvantage?

Empirical evidence shows Trade Agreements (TAs) increased trade among member countries, suggesting that the large number of TAs that do not include the United States may be eroding the U.S. presence in foreign markets.

Food Security of SNAP Recipients Improved Following the 2009 Stimulus Package

Food spending by low-income households increased and their food security improved as a result of the increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit levels authorized by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Irradiation of Produce Imports: Small Inroads, Big Obstacles

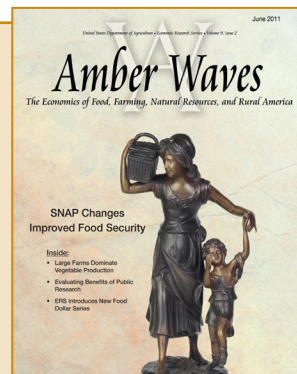
Irradiation is an alternative treatment for foodborne pests on imported fruit and vegetables, but it requires labeling and large investments in facilities and some consumers remain wary of the process.

Public Research Yields High Returns... Measured in More Than Dollars

Even though standard economic approaches may be difficult to apply to evaluations of some research benefits of public investments in agricultural research, economic reasoning can provide qualitative analysis even when estimates of benefits are difficult to quantify.

Rural America Benefits From Expanded Use of the Federal Tax Code for Income Support

Federal tax credits provided to low- and moderate-income households have grown over the last several decades and now provide a significant boost to the after-tax incomes of recipients. A larger share of rural taxpayers benefit from these provisions because they have historically had lower incomes and higher poverty rates than urban taxpayers. By 2008, one out of every three rural taxpayers received either the earned income or the child tax credit, increasing the average recipient's income by 13 percent.



School Foodservice Costs

www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR117/

Over 42 million meals were served on a typical school day in fiscal year 2009 to children through USDA's National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. School food authorities (SFAs) operate local school feeding programs and deliver the meals to the schools. Analysis of data on school costs per meal from a large, nationally representative sample reveals that geographic variation is important. The report *School Foodservice Costs: Location Matters* finds that, in the 2002-03 school year, SFAs in the Southwestern United States had, on average, consistently lower foodservice costs per meal than did SFAs in other regions. Urban locations had lower costs per meal than did their rural and suburban counterparts. Wage and benefit rates, food expenditures per meal, and SFA characteristics such as the mix of breakfasts and lunches served each contributed to differences in costs by location.

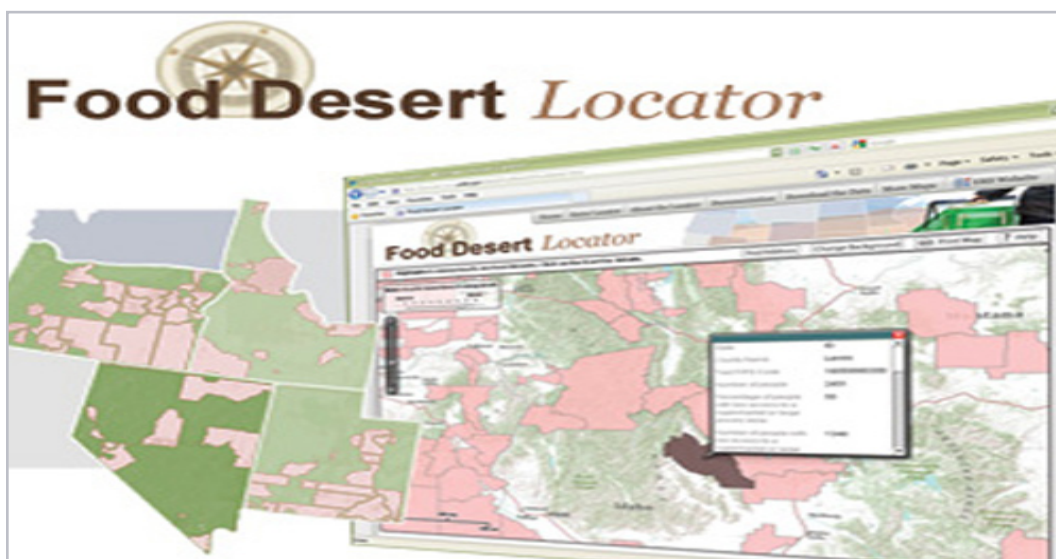


The WIC Fruit and Vegetable Cash Voucher

www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EIB75/



The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides supplemental foods to low-income women, infants, and children at nutritional risk. Since October 2009, WIC packages have included a fixed-value voucher for purchasing fruits and vegetables. Although this should help increase fruit and vegetable consumption by WIC participants, regional price variation could lead to different buying power—and nutritional benefits—across the country. Using 2004-06 Nielsen Homescan data, ERS examines prices of fruits and vegetables (fresh, frozen, and canned) in 26 metropolitan market areas. Results show that the 20 most commonly purchased fruits and vegetables cost 30-70 percent more in the highest priced market areas than in the lowest, implying that WIC participants in more expensive areas might be able to purchase fewer fruits and vegetables than those living where these items are cheaper.



The **Food Desert Locator** maps and provides selected population characteristics of census tracts that are food deserts—low-income neighborhoods without easy access to a supermarket or large grocery store.

[www.ers.usda.gov/
Data/FoodDesert/](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/FoodDesert/)

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